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THE MODERN STUDY OF CHINESE LIFE

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The earnest way in which the Occident is beginning to try to understand the Orient is evidenced in no clearer way than by the growing attitude of business firms in the Orient toward the acquisition by their members of the language of the people among whom they do business. It has always been a *sine qua non* for missionaries to learn the language, and for certain members of the diplomatic corps. But the last six years have marked a notable advance in the general feeling that the highest efficiency in any line requires an understanding of the people among whom one lives and of their language.

In the early days in China one's start in Chinese was gotten through dry text-books, not of the latest pedagogical standard, dispensed by a stolid gentleman, very conscious of his dignity as a scholar. To the casual observer this gentleman personified little more than a pair of heavy-rimmed spectacles, long fingernails, unimpaired by manual labor, and a lazy circulation. This personality prided itself on its handwriting and on its ability to read and recite from memory the age-honored classics. If it could impart reading and writing to its pupil, that was glory enough.

This old method of being set down with a Chinese pedagogue to draw whatever learning you could from his learned "stomach" (it was no artesian well, either) is fortunately being replaced by modern European methods, with much less loss of time and energy and much gain in accuracy of idiom and pronunciation. In fact, one of the joys of language school directors now-a-days is saving from language shipwreck some, who had they come out under the old

regime, would never have been able to communicate intelligibly in a foreign tongue.

There are several language schools in China, one in Japan and at least one in India. Most of these were started by missionaries. Today the North China Union Language School, to be concrete, has an enrollment of 174 students, drawn from 27 missions, 12 business firms, and 4 legations. It has a full-time principal, who has specialized in language study methods and in phonetics; about twenty foreign (American and British) volunteer teachers and lecturers, drawn from the community which, being in Peking includes specialists in all phases of Chinese life as well as in language; and eighty-seven Chinese men and women teachers trained in modern methods.

To us old-timers, the most remarkable thing about the school is the native teachers. They have lost their old-time dignity, and play volley-ball, while their pupils attend the lectures. Their long fingernails have gone and they have been instructed in the disqualifications of garlic and soiled collars. They don't mind acting a verb, if you don't understand their explanation. They have been chosen from literally hundreds of applicants, who think the job would be a sinecure. They are tried out by modern efficiency tests, the meaning of which they don't understand at all. Those who pass highest are then trained for two weeks before school opens and kept for a week of observation afterwards. Then they are set to teaching the head teacher helping by criticism and suggestion. They use no English. The daily routine is somewhat as follows: the new work, which is all oral, is given out by a Chinese head teacher every morning in Chinese to all the class, which then splits into small groups of eight or ten, these being handed over to other teachers, who drill the new work into them. Not yet are they supposed to know their

lesson. The next stage of the game is being closeted in a tiny study (there are rows and rows of them) with a teacher all to one's self, and the polishing of the day's lesson is continued. If the lesson is forgotten by the next day, the student should not worry (he is not allowed to use a note book); the teacher will see that he remembers it before another day.

The too long continued strain of close imitation and application is broken by chapel or a lecture about some phase of Chinese life in your own sweet-sounding tongue, during which you may take notes, if you wish,—or knit. Then there is the seminar work, which last year covered subjects like Chinese Ancient and Mediaeval History, Chinese Sociology, Governmental System, Religions, Current Chinese History and Foreign Relations,—all conducted by "experts, for the most part alone in their fields". These seminars start the students in the habit of independent investigation not only during the year of residence but after scattering to their stations.

In addition to the regular full time work, there are several special classes at the school for men already in business, who want to study Chinese on the side. The preparation for these classes is made at home, always with a Chinese teacher present, and the teachers expect to have their five daily teaching periods scattered anywhere through the twenty-four hours—before breakfast, at noon or after dark.

The Library aims to be the finest 'one in North China. Though started only three years ago, it is already very useable. With classes, seminars, lecture courses and library, one writer has tersely said that the North China Union Language School is "a kind of university post-graduate course in Chinese civilization."

